

March

Just as spring nudges against us once again,
And the sunlight rests on broken winter trees,
Not brittle but ready,
And we begin to yield to the hope of brighter days,
Ignoring just for a moment the sirens in the distance,
And the discarded masks shuffling along empty streets,
And even, once inside,
The stark hospital halls and the stubborn beeps.

We know it's okay to take a moment,
To be silent, to remember.
It's okay to know that we are resilient
Even as we stand, stunned, over the heartbreaking loss
And the breathtaking recovery.
This sliding away of an entire year,
This sliding into another year,
Alone and together, through windows and across halls,
Bodies hooded and gowned, faces covered and turned,
This, this is love in a pandemic.

The eyes that had to smile for us,
Because masks muted our mouths.
The screens that said goodbye, I love you, I'll see you again.
The gloves that held our hands, not hands, but still —
Heavy with hope and comfort.

March said,
I'm ripping away the life you knew.
Entering like a lion and roaring through the rest of the year.
Somehow we held fast against furious winds,
Losing and gaining friends, patients, neighbors, colleagues.
Long months of data and doubt,
Stats and stubbornness, work and worry.
Yes -- and grief and relief and guilt and pride
Climbing through us like vines or veins.

And now, today, we remember, we were there.
We marched, we gave, we prayed, we loved
Through a year that lasted so long, it's still here.

We're still here, now commemorating an anniversary
We want to forget.
This March, we know it's love that moves us.
The naked oaks will start to re-leaf,
The yellow crocuses to push through,
And, having rested for a moment,
Having reflected on the surreal,
We'll stand and stretch,
With eyes open and hearts unmasked:
We'll keep moving, forward, together, to heal.

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Scharper wrote this poem in March 2021 to commemorate the anniversary of the first patient admitted to Johns Hopkins Medicine with COVID-19.